

turbed by the broils of Christians. Great civil interests are neglected, the organisation of a system of national education is delayed, the movements of the Legislature thwarted and thrown into confusion, and important questions of humanity and good government are compelled to wait, till the intended peacemakers of the world have adjusted their own quarrels, and agreed among themselves.

IV. And this reminds us of the *scriptural* reasons for our union. What was the design of the whole Gospel economy? The angel who heralded the advent of its Divine Founder, announced that its object was peace on earth, and good-will towards men. The divisions of his followers, however, seem to intimate, that Christianity possesses the strange and questionable virtue of attracting all classes to itself, and of repelling them all from each other—that it converts all the enmity which they once felt against God, into hostility against each other—that those who were meant to be the peacemakers of the world, so far from fulfilling their office, have not yet been able to settle the preliminaries of even a truce among themselves, but are among the principal disturbers of society. And thus it is that our mutual contentions are actually placing in hazard the character and design of the Christian dispensation.

V. But during the early ages of Christianity, the Church visibly and really maintained its intended unity; and ought not this consideration to exercise a healing influence on Christians of the present day? With a thousand reasons for division of which we happily know nothing, the first Christians were one. The petty bickering which occasionally disturbed the peace of a particular society, did not affect the union of the general Church. "They who are at Rome," said the Bishop of Caesarea in a letter to Cyprian, "do not entirely observe all things which have been handed down from the beginning. . . . So, likewise, in a very great number of other provinces, many things vary according to the diversity of place and people; but nevertheless, their variations have at no time infringed the peace and unity of the catholic Church." Converging from the most opposite points, Christians met together at the cross, and the principle which drew them to that, bound them also to each other. And shall that example exist for us in vain? Shall we tempt the world to infer that the Gospel exhausted its benevolent power in its first efforts? that its uniting influence is irrecoverably lost? Of this we may be assured, that until we practically regard the unity of the primitive Church as obligatory on ourselves, its history exists only to aggravate our guilt and to increase our condemnation.

VI. Every inspired injunction of *mutual forbearance* among Christians, is a *scriptural* argument for the unity of the Church. When the apostle interfered to compose the differences in the church at Rome, though he admitted that they implied the existence of erroneous views, he not only did not enjoin the expulsion of the erring, he did not even peremptorily pronounce on which side the charge of error lay, but attempted to effect a reconciliation while each retained his peculiar tenets. And the ground on which he rests the obligation of each party to exercise forbearance with the other is, "for God has received him."\* "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also hath received us to the glory of God."† Here, then, is an apostolic canon for the regulation of the conduct of such Christians as fundamentally agree, while they differ on points of subordinate importance—a canon which imperatively requires them to exercise a reciprocal toleration and indulgence—to give each other credit for a conscientious

deference to the will of Christ—to view each other as mutually received of God—and this that they may on no account proceed to an open rupture. So that all the parties which at present divide the Church owing to diversities of opinion which are not inconsistent with salvation, exist in open violation of this sacred canon, impeach the inspired wisdom which enjoins it, and repeal all those commands of mutual toleration which harmonise with its spirit. Oh, how should it humble those parties to reflect, that were they to pass an act of oblivion for all the alienations and feuds of the past, mutually to concede the points at issue, and forthwith to embrace and become one—vast as the sacrifice would appear in their own eyes, and great as the event would certainly be in its happy results—it would after all be only and simply an exercise of Christian forbearance, an act of obedience to the heavenly voice which says, "forbear." And shall they who are commanded even to love their enemies, show that they have not Christianity enough to bear with their friends? Shall they whose religion requires them to pray for their deadly persecutors, show that they have not religion enough to pray with their brethren of another name? Is this to "forbear one another in love?"

VII. Let Christians remember that Christ commands their unity. And the unity he enjoins is that which is cemented by love; so that mutual forbearance itself is to be exercised, not reluctantly, but as the result and expression of Christian affection. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." He will not accept that as love to the brethren, which consists only of love to a party. The affection which he demands is that which embraces Christians as Christians, and therefore all Christians—which loves on a universal reason. He will not accept that as love to the brethren which merely tolerates their existence—which simply gives them leave to be—which allows them to worship God only on the stern condition that they remove to a distance, and remain apart from us. Surely we cannot suppose that such a state of mind could ever justify us in saying, "We know that we have passed from death unto life;" and yet the state of mind which believers ought mutually to cherish would justify them in saying that, for it would furnish a scriptural proof of their being in a state of salvation. It is not possible that love of any kind should confine itself to mere negative expressions—to bare abstinence from the infliction of injury—least of all the fraternal love which Christ requires in his people. It "suffereth long, and is kind, and never faileth;" for its exemplar is the ever-active and all-fruitful love of Christ to themselves.

To render this exercise of love still more obligatory, our Lord inculcates it as the principal mark by which his followers are to be distinguished in every age; as the chief evidence of our being in a state of union with himself; as furnishing to the world a convincing proof of the divinity of the Gospel; and as the all-pervading principle which alone can prevent a "schism in the body." That it might have a pattern which should move as well as teach, our Lord proposes himself—"as I have loved you, that ye also love one another;" intimating, at once, how rich their fraternal love should be in its fruits, and how ample in its embrace, for his love is extended indiscriminately to every member of his spiritual body. And to render the command irresistible, he waits till the cross is in view before he utters it—urges it as his last request—repeats it as peculiarly the law of Calvary—as if he would make it impossible for them ever to revisit the hallowed scene without hearing it issue from the cross afresh; or ever to meet around his table without feeling themselves bound to pledge each other anew to mutual love, over the sacred symbols of his love to them. Oh, if Christians did but remember that they

\* Rom. xiv. 3.

† Rom. xv. 1—7.